

Series: Psalms
Title: Cleansing our Way
Text: Ps 119: 9-16
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Psalm 119: 9: BETH. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word. 10: With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments. 11: Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee. 12: Blessed *art* thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes. 13: With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth. 14: I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as *much as* in all riches. 15: I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. 16: I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.

Psalm 119: 9: BETH. Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word.

God's word is addressed to every sinner from the young to the old, rich or poor, male or female, whatever state we are in, there is a word for us in the scriptures. Any man is meant. God's word is profitable to cleanse young or old, unbeliever or believer. We all begin unbelievers who God cleanses by the word in the new birth. Believers are cleansed by the word throughout the life of faith. We are only cleansed and have our way cleansed by taking heed according to God's word. God will see to it by God's power that we heed the word of the Lord.

2 Timothy 3: 15...from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16: All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17: That the man of God may be perfect, [that is] thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Proposition: Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed *thereto* according to thy word.

MADE TO KNOW WE ARE UNCLEAN

Sinners need to know we are unclean. It takes God to make us know we are unclean. How does God make his child know he is unclean? It is by God making us take heed according to his word.

For those God is first calling, it the word of the gospel that the Spirit blesses to make us know we are defiled and need to be cleansed. God is holy. He is pure. God's word declares that every person is conceived in sin in our mother's womb. We are shapen in iniquity. We are transgressors from the womb. Our heart, our ways, our actions are evil from our youth.

Isaiah 64: 6: But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

For the elect, it is God's word making us behold our Holy Lord Jesus laying down his life in the room and stead of his people that makes us know we need to be cleansed. When we read Psalm 119, the pride of our sin-nature makes a believer prone to flatter ourselves. We especially flatter ourselves if we are in a time of peace, without affliction, while others have sinned and are being afflicted of the Lord. It makes it easier for us to look upon others as the sinner and makes it harder to see ourselves as the sinner. It will help us to understand this psalm if we know the end from the beginning. In order to understand this Psalm we need to know David's state. This is where God brought David. This is why David wrote this Psalm. We find it in the last verse, "*I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.*" This Psalm is written about different periods of David's life. It is like a diary recording the various troubles David faced and how the Lord saved David beginning to end. Listen to David's word about himself,

Psalm 119: 25: My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken thou me according to thy word... 28: My soul melteth for heaviness: strengthen thou me according unto thy word....39: Turn away my reproach which I fear: for thy judgments *are* good....41: Let thy mercies come also unto me, O LORD, *even* thy salvation, according to thy word. 42: So shall I have wherewith to answer him that reproacheth me: for I trust in thy word....50: This *is* my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me...67: Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word....71: *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes....83: For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; *yet* do I not forget thy statutes... 176: I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments.

David was a believer. But David was a sinner. David was holy. But David strayed at times like a lost sheep. Every true believer will admit that he is just like David. But the Lord sanctified the affliction to David's inward man. The Spirit of God kept turning David to Christ by the word. It was in David's inner man--his new man created of God--that David continued walking by faith in Christ. It was God making David take heed to the word of the Lord. When David strayed he was helpless. Only God could turn him.

Spurgeon said, "He confessed his helplessness. He was not like a dog, that somehow or other can find its way back; but he was like a lost sheep, which goes further and further away from home; yet still he was a sheep, and the Lord's sheep, his property, and precious in his sight, and therefore he asked the Lord to seek and restore him."

Boice said, "[He] had not become self-righteous by his devotions, despite his reiterated claims to have obeyed the Bible's teachings." The Lord did not make David take the stance with the boasting Pharisee. The word of the Lord made David take his place with the publican who stood afar off, crying for mercy and went home justified.

By blessing the word to his inward man, God made him know his need and convicted him of the sufficiency of God's grace to keep him. This is how the Lord blesses his word to every regenerated heart. When Christ's sheep wander, the Spirit of God keeps us conscious that our salvation is Christ alone. His word tries us and rebukes us. But the word encourages us and strengthens us. God teaches us and protects us. It is Christ who has delivered us, who is delivering us and who shall continue to deliver us.

MADE TO KNOW THE ONLY ONE WHO CLEANSES

In order to be cleansed God must make us know there is but one who is clean. The word calls him the Holy One. There is only one who is clean. It is Christ Jesus. How does God make us know that one? It is by God making us take heed according to his word.

The deceiving sinful heart within every son of Adam makes sinners read the words "law, commandments, statutes and precepts" and imagine they have life by keeping the ten commandments or the new covenant precepts. Christ said,

John 5: 39: Search the scriptures...

The Pharisees were searching the law, the commandments, the precepts, the statutes. Christ declares why they searched the scriptures.

John 5: 39:...for in them ye think ye have eternal life:

This is the result of having an unclean, deceitful, defiled heart from Adam. Every unregenerate sinner thinks he can cleanse his way by his works under the law. But every born-again child of God has a sin-nature that often deceives us into searching the scriptures for the same purpose. But Christ declares that these scriptures all speak of him.

John 5: 39...and they are they which testify of me. 40: And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.

If any sinner has eternal life it by Christ the Life. It is by Christ freely giving us life by grace. He gives life freely because Christ freely justified God's elect by his obedience unto the death of the cross. But no sinner can cleanse his way because we are unclean.

Job 14: 4 Who can bring a clean *thing* out of an unclean? not one.

The word of the Lord declares that Christ Jesus is the fountain open for sin and uncleanness. Christ is the Perfect servant of God. It is by the obedience of One that God's elect are made clean. Christ made his people the righteousness of God in him. Christ Jesus is the fountain open for sin and uncleanness.

Zechariah 13: 1: In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin [for justification] and for uncleanness. [sanctification/purification]

In the beginning, the great Shepherd of the Sheep sends his gospel to his lost sheep and washes us by the water of the word and by the Spirit of God. Throughout the life of the believer, the Head of the church continues to renew and wash his believing, straying sheep by the same gospel through the Holy Spirit.

Titus 3: 5: Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; 7: THAT being [that having been] justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Christ justified God's elect on the cross. Having been justified, our merciful Redeemer sends the Holy Spirit and by the Spirit we are born again. By the Holy Spirit God's saints continue to be renewed. This is because due to Christ justifying us we must be made to know we are heirs and given the hope of eternal life. So Christ washes us by the water of the word. He washes us by the preaching of the person and finished work of Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 5: 25...Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26: That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word 27: That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Christ himself is our Prophet, Priest and King. It is Christ himself, through God the Holy Spirit, that speaks the word of the gospel into our hearts and makes his child clean.

John 15: 3: Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

Purification of the heart--sanctification--is by the Holy Spirit giving us faith to behold the Lord Jesus Christ. He sends the gospel,

Acts 26: 18: To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

Christ is the brightness of the Father's glory. For now, we cannot see the fulness of him. But when the Holy Spirit makes a sinful man behold Christ, it is through faith that our inward man is purged. The Lord taught Peter that the meaning of the dietary laws is that God alone makes his people clean. Then the Lord sent Peter to Gentiles who God cleansed through the preaching of Christ and him crucified. Peter said of those Gentiles to whom he was sent with the gospel, "God, which knoweth the hearts,...put no difference between us [Jews] and [those Gentiles], purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 17: 8-9)

Sinner, have you plunged into this fountain? How do I do so? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Confess to God that you are sin and have sinned and beg mercy and you shall have it. This is what the Spirit of God makes his child do through the preaching of Christ Jesus and him crucified. Our triune God in Christ gets the glory of purifying our hearts through faith in Christ. He cleanses us and forgives us when the Spirit draws us to Christ to confess our sin.

1 John 1: 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

MADE TO KNOW THE ONLY ONE WHO CONTINUES TO CLEANSE

Once cleansed we must continue to be made to know that the only way we continue to be cleansed is by Christ. It is only by Christ that we are cleansed and continue to be cleansed. It is only by the Spirit of God. How are we made to know this? By Christ making us take heed according to his word.

After declaring that he had made his apostles clean through his word, Christ said,

John 17: 4: Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

David did not cease being the child of God when he strayed. God our Father receives us in Christ our Righteousness without change. God accepts his child in Christ our Sanctification without change. And God looks on the heart he has made whole. He knows the desire of the new heart is to honor him and he remembers we are dust. God says, "For where there is a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not" (2 Cor 8: 12). God had made David righteous in Christ. God had made David clean by Christ abiding in him. He said to Peter,

Acts 10:15...What God hath cleansed, *that* call not thou common.

So the Lord found David and cleansed David from his defilement. He made David take heed to the Lord's word. Therefore he said in verse 10: *With my whole heart have I sought THEE:*

The Lord makes us seek Christ himself. By renewing him, David desired to have his whole heart directed to the Lord Jesus. David sought with his whole heart to be kept in Christ. David desired that God would not let him wander from the commandments which proclaim salvation wholly in Christ. David cried, "*With my whole heart have I sought THEE.*"

When we sin we do not fall into despair and bondage but it is only by the Spirit. By the Spirit we agree with the law's charge that we are the sinner. By the Spirit we run to Christ who made satisfaction on our behalf. By the Holy Spirit we rest in Christ's obedience. By the Spirit blessing the word of the gospel to our hearts we seek grace from Christ. By the Holy Spirit we seek to walk as Christ enables us. David confessed this. He confessed he was yet a sinner in need of Christ to keep him. He said in verse 10:...*O let me not wander from thy commandments.*

The Lord made him know he yet had an old man of sin warring against his new man. Christ Jesus the Lord had given him just enough room to convince him that without Christ he could do nothing except wander from the Lord's commandments. It is this grace of God teaching us this that makes us meek. We stop boasting of our own ability to make ourselves holy. We confess that we are the sinner.

The Holy Spirit turns us again to behold the Lord Jesus Christ. Look to Christ if you would see your sin. When the Holy One walked this earth, Christ nature was holy. His every thought was pure. His every deed was righteous. When the Righteous One was despised and rejected and nailed on the cursed tree, he was in perfect control of his spirit. Have you ever hit your hand with a hammer? Do you think only pure, holy thoughts without one sin? When they nailed the Substitutes hands and feet to the cross he never had one sinful thought in his heart. Has anyone every spit in your face? Did you have a sinful thought? Christ prayed for his enemies. When we truly behold something of how holy and righteous Christ is, even while suffering the curse of the cross, then we cease boasting in ourselves. Beholding Christ crucified in our room and stead our hearts are made contrite. That is when we stop pleading our own righteousness and ask God to be merciful to us. That is when we stop boasting of works we did to make ourselves holy and we know Christ alone is Sanctification unto us.

Believer, do you ever go astray? In our inward man no believer wants to go astray. Yet, that is the only thing our sinful flesh wants. But when we stray our great Shepherd finds us. David's straying was all his fault. Our straying is our fault alone. But God made David experience this that he might be more dependent upon our great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 45:24: Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: even to him shall men come; and all that are incensed against him shall be ashamed.

In 1758, another hymn writer wrote this as a young man of 22 years old.

Come thou Fount of every blessing
Tune my heart to sing thy grace
Streams of mercy never ceasing
Call for songs of loudest praise

Jesus sought me when a stranger
WANDERING from the face of God
He to save my soul from danger
Interposed his precious blood

And because he had been cleansed by Christ, he saw his old sin-nature, so that he wrote:

O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be
Let that grace, Lord, like a fetter
Bind my WANDERING HEART to thee

Prone to WANDER, Lord, I feel it
Prone to LEAVE the God I love
Take my heart, oh, take and seal it
With thy Spirit from above

Spurgeon said, *"Watch, pray, resolve, but still come back to this—"Lord, help me; Lord, save me; Lord, keep me." The old plowman whom I sometimes used to talk with before he went to Heaven said to me, "Depend upon it, if you and I get one inch above the ground, we shall be that inch too high. There is much truth in his plain remark. If we get any high notions of what we are, we shall soon sink below what we should be. Lie low! Aspire high! Be nothing! Take Christ to be your All-in-All!"*

THE EFFECT OF BEING TURNED TO CHRIST

What is the effect of the Spirit when Christ turns us to him? Then we have peace in our conscience that passeth all understanding. God makes us more diligent to heed his word because we do not want to sin against him who has been so merciful to save us. David wrote in verse 11, *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*

The Lord's word makes us more dependent upon the LORD to teach us. David said in verse 12, *"Blessed art thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes."*

His gospel makes us declare the good news to others--verse 13, *"With my lips have I declared all the judgments of thy mouth."*

His gospel makes us rejoice. David wrote in verse 14, *"I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches."* He makes us more hungry for Christ and his righteousness more than earthly bread and fame and riches. Those that Christ makes spiritually hungry beg God for the heavenly Manna. The poor beg for the true riches. David cried out in Psalm 51, "Create within me a clean heart O God, and renew within me a right spirit." Job said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23: 12).

He creates a more earnest resolve in our new man--verse 15-16, *"I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word."*

God's word blessed to his heart made David seek the Lord, hide his word in his heart, declare the good news to others and rejoice in Christ. It made David meditate, have respect to God's ways, delight himself in God's statutes, and remember the word of the Lord. This is growth in grace by God through the Lord's chastening afflictions. It produces conviction of personal unworthiness and conviction that Christ is our only Righteousness and Sanctification who keeps us in his holiness. By the word, the Spirit sets our affection more on Christ.

The paradox of the mystery of godliness is that the way to purity and peace of conscious is through the consciousness of corruption in ourselves and righteousness in Christ. It never ceases this side of heaven.

Amen!